

Congresswoman Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY), chair of the House Rules Committee, said she is asking President Obama to support her legislation banning the non therapeutic use of antibiotics in pigs, cows and chickens and other livestock. Slaughter said she was taking the action to help spark action on her legislation, which she would like to move forward this year.

“I was relieved to hear that the Food and Drug Administration sees this as a serious public health issue but we need to do more,” said Slaughter. “It’s always been my position that we can address the overuse of antibiotics through legislation or simply with a bold decision from this administration. We have heard overwhelming evidence from my hearing and from other sources that an excessive reliance on antibiotics allows farmers to keep animals in inhumane conditions, dilutes the effectiveness of our antibiotic supply, leads to the growth of resistant ‘super bugs’ and risks sparking a backlash among our trading partners.”

Slaughter, a microbiologist, held a hearing on the issue July 13 before the Rules Committee. Thirty-six members of Congress joined Rep. Slaughter in signing the letter.

October 08, 2009      The Honorable Barack Obama   President of the United States   The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue

Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We would like to thank you for your increased commitment to addressing the public health threat posed by antibiotic resistant disease, including foodborne pathogens. In particular we want to commend the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for their recent agreement to begin addressing the overuse of antibiotics for non-therapeutic purposes in livestock production. We also respectfully request that you direct the FDA to ban non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in livestock production.

As you know, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said that antibiotic resistance is one of the world's most pressing public health problems. Antibiotics are the miracle drugs of

the 20th century, yet overuse leads to development of resistant bacteria. An estimated 70 percent of all antibiotics used in this country are fed to farm animals for non-therapeutic purposes, principally to keep them from becoming sick when they are raised in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. With simple, common sense and inexpensive improvements to animal husbandry practices, it would not be necessary to give animals routine and large volumes of antibiotics.

Addressing this critical issue is not only important for protecting the public's health, but also for ensuring that United States livestock producers remain competitive in international markets.

The European Union, New Zealand, Thailand, and Korea all have either banned or will begin banning antibiotic growth promoters in animal feed. Under World Trade Organization rules, trading partners who implement this ban will have the right to refuse imports that do not meet this standard. Consequently, if the United States continues to allow non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in livestock, there could be very serious trade and economic implications.

On July 13, in a statement before the House Committee on Rules, FDA Deputy Commissioner Joshua Sharfstein assured the committee that the FDA is committed to curbing such uses, that FDA believes using antibiotics for growth promotion purposes should be banned, and that that other livestock uses of these drugs should be carried out under the supervision of a veterinarian. After decades of inaction, we are very pleased that the FDA is now taking a strong stance on this urgent issue.

At the same time, both the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner have indicated that FDA's process to review such uses of drugs is cumbersome and that legislation may be needed to address this issue more quickly. That said, we urge you to work with Congress to support the passage of H.R. 1549, the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act. We look forward to your support in passing this critical legislation.

Thank you again for your commitment to addressing this critical public health and food safety issue.

Sincerely, Louise M. Slaughter Member of Congress